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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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STATE FOR SCA/FO DAS GASTRIGHT, SCA/A, S/CRS, S/CT
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG
NSC FOR AHARRIMAN
OSD FOR FARA
CENTCOM FOR CFC-A, CG CJTF-76, POLAD

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: PRT PANJSHIR: PARLIAMENTARY SPEAKER QANOONI OPENS
SCHOOL AND BLASTS PAKISTAN

REF: PARIS 6542

Summary

¶1. (SBU) The grand opening of the Teachers, Training College (TTC) October 10 in Panjshir combined several unusual features for a public ceremony: a large Kabul delegation; a strong Afghan lead; some participation of women; and, for the first time, broad political themes dealing with regional issues. Wolesei Jirga Speaker Qanooni, a Panjshiri, denounced Pakistan for representing the home of, and providing the base for, the Taliban. He said any attempt to appease the Taliban, or cut secret deals with them, would backfire. One of the attending parliamentarians told the PRT later that Qanooni's speech was not so much a call to arms as a wake-up call for the Panjshiris -- and likely an attempt to burnish his credentials as an international player and presidential material. End Summary

Setting

¶2. (U) Over five hundred Panjshiris, including one hundred women and representatives from the PRT, gathered October 10 for the grand opening of the Teachers, Training College (TTC). Under a blazing sun during Ramazan, the congregation sat through a two-and-a-half-hour ceremony that featured prayers from mullahs, speeches from politicians and chants from both male and female students.

¶3. (U) The Ministry of Defense had constructed the 40-room building amid old military barracks. It represents one of the largest and finest structures in the whole province. Army Chief of Staff Bismullah Khan, a Panjshiri, reportedly after strong lobbying from provincial officials, had transferred it to the Ministry of Education. Governor Bahlul spearheaded the effort, a reflection of his view of education as a top priority of development.

Seating

¶4. (U) The program included a handful of Afghan officials and parliamentarians from Kabul. In attendance from the capital were Yanus Qanooni, the Speaker of the Wolesei Jirga; Meshrano Jirga members Aref and Azatyar; Wolesei Jirga member Regestani; and the First Deputy Minister of Education Ghaznawi. Provincial officials included Governor Bahlul, Education Director Rizai and other line directors. Organizers invited representatives from the PRT to be seated on the speakers, platform, but agreed to allow them to take places in the second row to emphasize the Afghan lead in the proceedings.

Domestic Policy

¶5. (U) The speakers) Governor Bahlul, Speaker Qanooni, Deputy Minister Ghaznawi, and Director Rizai) all identified education as a central force for Afghan development. They spoke of the social and economic devastation in recent years, of the importance of schools for the future and of the need to train teachers. The Governor called education his top priority, urged parents to get involved to promote their children's learning, underscored the role of science in the modern curriculum, and requested assistance from the Ministry of Education. Speaker Qanooni echoed many of these themes, noting his standing as a Panjshiri and drawing on his previous tenure as Minister of Education. Deputy Minister Ghaznawi pledged to help the TTC

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and noted his proposal, now pending at the Finance Ministry, to raise teachers' salaries by ten-fold, from \$80 to \$800. Director Rizai outlined the function of the TTC, saying 48 trainers would help professionalize 200 students aspiring to become teachers.

Foreign Policy

¶6. (U) Qanooni, alone among the quartet of speakers, addressed themes beyond education. He said the Taliban had demonstrated its hostility to education, especially for girls. Afghans therefore needed to resist the Taliban, who represented a foreign force in the country. Indeed, Qanooni said, the Taliban were not true Afghans; otherwise they would not play such a destructive role. &There are no Afghan Taliban; they all come from Pakistan.8 The neighboring country was not just their base but also their home.

¶7. (U) Continuing, but without mentioning any leaders by name, Qanooni argued it was a strategic blunder to negotiate with the Taliban. Any attempt to appease them, or cut secret deals, would ultimately backfire. He noted that, as speaker of the Wolesei Jirga, parliamentarians from northern Afghanistan were approaching him with concerns that the Taliban insurgency was splitting the country once again into two, a north and a south. Qanooni vowed to oppose this division. &If we give them three provinces, they will insist on all thirty-four.8

PRT Policy

¶8. (U) PRT representatives sought a low profile to accentuate the Afghan lead. The PRT had worked earlier to promote the transfer of the building from the Ministry of Defense to the Ministry of Education. PRT engineers had done a survey of the site. We will pursue the options of using CERP funds for various complementary projects, including

digging a well and providing a generator.

¶9. (U) After the ceremony, Qanooni and Bahlul called us over to confer. Qanooni thanked the PRT for its commitment to Panjshir development. He cited various projects, including the road, district centers and micro-hydros, as milestones of progress in the valley. He also encouraged us to continue reaching out to the local community. Our efforts in the past, he said, had garnered the respect of Panjshiris from all walks of life. We responded that our partnership with Panjshiris was at the heart of our work.

Comment

¶10. (SBU) The ceremony was unusual in several respects. It featured a large Kabul delegation, a rarity for Panjshir. While the PRT had assisted earlier behind the scenes, the project was essentially Afghan. It also included the participation of local women, both in the audience and as part of the program. All of these aspects made the event noteworthy) indeed, successful with a unique twist.

¶11. (SBU) Qanooni added a new element: public utterance of political themes we are more frequently hearing in private but which are rarely uttered in a large public gathering. Panjshiris heard them from him in a public setting for the first time. Senator Aref told us later that Qanooni's speech was a significant moment for the province) not so much a call to arms, but a wake-up call. Qanooni sounded many of these notes in his recent visit to Paris (ref), and it may well be part of a longer-term campaign to establishing himself as presidential material.

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